

Racism embedded deep in American history proves ignorance of those who would deny our failures

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In the wake of the [critical race theory controversy](#), we could see school boards and legislative bodies claiming that history curriculums needed to be more “balanced”, that “both sides” needed to be included, that students needed to be exposed to different points of view.

Conservatives wanted schools to teach “both sides” of the [Holocaust](#), “both sides” of slavery, “both sides” of the genocide of Native Americans, “both sides” of the Civil War. The academic consensus has been clear for decades: There are no two sides to these topics. There are decades of research and scholarly work around these themes in the disciplines of sociological and historiographic erudition.

As of now, the GOP is finding new ways to weaponize themes related to race, gender, and other systemic disparities that affect our society daily. Their clear intent is throwing red meat to their base and winning elections. In the years since Trumpism began, we have seen an increase in [racist and anti-immigrant sentiments](#) coming from that particular base.

The strategy has been about creating the idea that topics related to history or systemic disparities have different points of view, that they are open to different opinions. Former President Trump did this when he spoke about “[very fine people on both sides](#)” during the Charlotte riots. By creating this illusion, hate ideologies such as white supremacy, white nationalism, transphobia, homophobia, misogyny and racism, can be normalized, downplayed and presented as acceptable and tolerable expressions in society.

Elections like the governor’s race in Virginia were determined by controversy over CRT in schools. The GOP candidate [created the illusion](#) that CRT was part of the current curriculum. Then he included any type of education that addresses structural racism or discrimination in schools.

In that way, any attempt to educate people about diversity and inclusion, or any initiative that works with attending racial disparities in public health, is seen by these groups as anti-American, anti-patriotic propaganda.

The reality is that studies related to systemic racism, poverty, white privilege, or inherent white supremacy have decades of data collection, data analysis, and scholarly work behind them. The academic consensus in the fields of sociology, history, and psychology regarding the short- and long-term effects of these social phenomena has been overwhelmingly clear for many years.

The problem is that most Americans [have a poor social theory lens](#), due in part to poor social studies lessons at both primary and higher education levels. Most people will not engage with these types of advanced studies unless they choose a career in the human services field.

Before sociology was a discipline in higher education, what we had was a collection of sociological and social theories. Most of these theories developed during the enlightenment period. They are based on the observation of disparities and conflicts related to class, race, gender, and socioeconomic/political systems. I have seen people in the media accusing academia of being “Marxist.”

These comments ignore the fact that Marx was one of the main figures of the enlightenment period. Also, communism is just one theory of many from Marx. His theories on how to predict the behavior of the market in relation to production are unmatched and relevant today.

All the fathers of sociology, such as Comte, Marx, Webber, and Durkheim, saw social conflict as a lens through which we can understand how society behaves. These lenses are anti-oppressive because they identify the conflict between the dominant class and the worker's class as arising from systems that value production over humanity.

Our country was founded on the principles of [white supremacy and slavery](#). Our foundational ideologies are influenced by imperialism, [colonialism](#), and the worst margins of Western Christianity. They are the primary source that informs our attitudes, behaviors, and automatic responses to diversity, race, multiculturalism, and gender.

That is what we mean when we speak about racism, and other forms of hate being “embedded” or “[ingrained](#)” into our culture.

Patriarchy informs how we react to genders, sexuality and domestic roles. White supremacy informs how we interact and interpret scenarios of race, migration and otherness. [Western Christianity](#) has provided the religious narratives that have justified these ideologies for centuries. These ideologies are not only operating in the white dominant class, but they also operate in minorities through assimilation and colonialism. The oppressed defend the system created by the oppressor, [like those](#) suffering from Stockholm Syndrome defend their kidnappers.

This is what we mean when we say that racism is as American as apple pie, or like the very air we breathe. These are not exaggerations. Studies done on [systemic racism and mental health](#) show how patterns of systemic trauma inform learning disabilities, mental illnesses, poverty rates and health outcomes with damaging and lethal results.

There are no “two sides” when it comes to stating that [systemic racism](#) is a determinant factor that directly affects inequalities and human relations. Health outcomes, wealth accumulation, employment, and access to education and health care are heavily influenced by [systems](#).

As social scientists, we are not saying that personal choices and bad decisions don't play a role in individual outcomes. People do carry the responsibility for their actions. But the reality is that most studies done on this topic show that societal structures carry a heavier weight than

individual agency when it comes to determining behaviors, decision making and mental health. Especially now with social media, the power of systems to determine what people think or believe has grown tenfold.

Conservatives are in denial, not only about the history of these systems but also about how they are still active and affecting our present history.

As a Puerto Rican, one example that hits home for me is U.S. imperialism. Its existence is a given in post-graduate social studies. After the Spanish-American war, the U.S exploited resources in Latin America and the Caribbean. It destabilized the economies and manipulated local elections for the benefit of American corporations. From the creation of the [banana republics](#) to [Operation Bootstrap](#) in Puerto Rico, [Operation Condor](#) in South America, to 57 military invasions in the region, the trail of blood created conditions that still fuel migration movements today. This is the type of content not discussed in schools.

Most Americans are ignorant about how we became a wealthy nation, how riches were transferred from exploited countries into our economy. In the U.S., 60% of wealth is inherited and comes from activities related to slavery, mass incarceration, settler colonialism, illegal land grabs and exploitation of other countries. Somehow, most Americans believe in the myth of a self-made, hardworking country. To add insult to injury, inherited wealth is exempt from capital gains taxes up to \$10 million.

Our ingrained racism is blocking our path to becoming a nation.

Board v Brown was decided in 1954, but the [last school district to integrate](#) did so in 2016. Studies show that the growth of new school suburban districts is a racist tool to avoid diversity and multiculturalism and [enact redlining](#) through higher property taxes. Only 13% of [marriages](#) are interracial, and signs of [white anxiety](#) due to the browning of America are everywhere. The real path to unity is to stop resisting racial and cultural integration.

Understanding these truths is not assuming an anti-American position or being unpatriotic. We can acknowledge the greatness of the United States as a unique experiment in democracy. We can speak about the brilliance of our Constitution and the Bill of Rights. We can be proud of achievements in infrastructure, innovation in science and the potential we have as a multicultural melting pot to become a new type of country.

To get there, we need to overcome bigotry, ignorance, and uplift education as a powerful tool in the quest to achieve true reconciliation and unity.

As we see the rise of hate in America and the structures of white supremacy moving in to protect their power, I meditate on the [four questions](#) asked by W.E.B Dubois as he also faced the challenge of structural racism and hate:

1) What does integrity do in the face of oppression?

- 2) What does honesty do in the face of lies / deception?
- 3) What does decency do in the face of insult?
- 4) How does virtue meet brute force?